

There are many stories in the wasteland, many remain untold, many never will, as is the nature of war and war, war never changes. This is the story of project safe-stable, run by the Ardenalia* stem of Stable-Tec, a series of stables built to safeguard a select portion of the population from mega-spell warfare. Of course this was not the real reason why these stables were created, that was far more sinister. This tale of the post apocalyptic wasteland that was Oatstralia, begins with the residents of safe-stable number 34, specifically a grey, ordinary looking unicorn pony named Prince Dark Star bob the third

Ahh the lights, blinded me as I entered the Atrium.

“SURPRISE!” every pony yelled as my vision began to clear. In all honesty, I was expecting this, every pony does, but I still acted surprised as this was my tenth birthday party. It was nice to have my own personal reprieve from the dull monotonous life in a stable, all the walls identical, everything symmetrical, except when there’s a party.

“We really surprised you didn’t we?” said a bright orange pegasus pony named Amata, the overseer’s daughter.

“Yeah you really did!” I lied.

“Really?” said Amata looking at me with a disappointed expression.

“No not really.” I said. Amata giggled.

“I think your dad wants to see you.”

“Abigail, your mother and I can’t believe how much you’ve grown, go on, socialise a bit make some friends.” said my father lovingly.

The rest of the party I mostly spent with Amata, pausing briefly to get my pip buck, a technological masterpiece that had everything from tracking spells to Stable Assisted Targeting Software. We were fast becoming best friends when the one thing every pony dreads happened.

The warning was clear and concise:

“EVERYPONY REMAIN CALM THIS IS YOUR OVERSEER SPEAKING WE HAVE DETECTED A MALFUNCTION IN ONE OF THE MAIN REACTOR CORES IN SECTOR 7G, ALL AUTHORISED PONIES PLEASE PROCEED TO THE AREA AND ASSESS THE PROBLEM” the intercom cut off with a second or two of white noise, then silence.

No pony moved, then panic erupted, parents gathered their children and left the atrium heading for designated safe points, leaving me alone with my parents and my brother John.

“John look after your sister Abigail, don’t let her out of your sight ok?”

“Yes Dad.” Said John, a small amount of fear sneaking into his tones.

Then my Mother and Father bolted off towards sector 7G.

Shortly after I made my way behind them, closely followed by John, who’d used the argument that he was supposed to watch me and if I went to watch Mum and Dad then he would just have to go with me. When we got there it was already too late to do anything. The doors had sealed shut, to quarantine the radiation with my parents inside. I somehow instantly knew that the reactor had gone beyond repair, and that the only way to stop the whole stable from dying was to vent all of the radioactive steam into the room, sealing it forever and killing all that inhabited it. There was no other way, I knew that, but this did not stop me from charging at the glass door with all my might, kicking it until my hind hooves were cracked and bleeding. My parents looked at John and said, “look after her”, and then they knelt down and looked me in my eyes and said:

“Were sorry we won’t be able to see you grow up big and strong...but you’ll always have your big brother to look after you.”

“But I don’t want you to go, there has to be another way!” I exclaimed. Desperately, tears rolled down my eyes

“There is no other way, you know that as well as we do.” They were right of course but I did not want to believe it, I went back to smashing the door with my hind hooves despite the pain until my brother lifted me onto his back. I put my fore hooves against the glass. My mother and father each put one hoof over mine on the glass, briefly kissed each other, then uttered a final goodbye before a searing cloud of

radioactive steam vaporised them.

I yelled incoherently at the top of my lungs for a full hour before I finally became exhausted. I looked up to see John crying. I had ever seen him cry before. It was so heartbreaking, there were so many conflicting emotions in my head that I just couldn't understand them all. Part of me felt angry that somepony let this happen in the first place, but other parts of me only felt sadness. The situation was not helped by my cutie mark appearing at this moment.

I cried myself to sleep in my brother's arms that night and many nights to follow.

Life in the stable quickly returned to normal for everyone else, I had shattered my hooves on the door so I was unable to walk for 3 months, but the emotional wounds took far longer. Everypony expected me to be perfect to live up to my parent's legacy. Everytime I did something wrong, they compared me to my famous parents, making me feel anger, which I bottled up continuously for years. My only friend, Amata, was the only person never to do this and I loved her for that. Unable to figure out what my cutie mark meant, I was stuck in limbo between having a blank flank and having a purpose in life. To me, it felt like a living hell.

"Mornin' little buddy!" said my big brother, waking me up. "It's time to take the H.O.R.S.E!"

"Not the Harmonised Organisational Registered Selection Examination." I moaned out loud, knowing that I would ace it. My I.Q. was the highest in stable history, yet I was still nervous, because I had not yet been able to understand what my cutie mark meant. It was a split mark, very rare, I was quite proud of it. On one side a brain and on the other a gun, I knew what the gun meant but, the gun always unnerved me, like there was something hidden within me.

"Let's get going sis, you don't want to know what happens to ponies who fail the H.O.R.S.E." my brother said in his trademark comedian voice. What his cutie mark meant was obvious, with his orange fur, his multicoloured mane and a microphone for a cutie mark. His job was obviously a stand up comedian. He would annoy me for hours testing his comedy routines on me, only half of which were even remotely funny.

"Must you do that now?" I complained putting on my school saddle bags.

"I'm just messing with ya, you're just so easy a target, and I don't really have anyone else to practice on do I?" My brother had been like a father to me ever since our parents died 6 years ago. As a result statues of them were erected by the completely self loving artist named Leonardo da Vinci. Of course his real name is Bob Stewart.

"Come on I'll walk you to school." said my brother all joviality disappearing from his voice.

I got to the test and every pony was already seated and had the test open on their Apple I desks.

"Sorry I'm late miss Taylor" I said, flushed from the run to class. Miss Taylor was a short wrinkly old mare who wore her glasses in such a way that it seemed as though she was always watching you.

"Hurry up and sit down! Next time you're late, I'll report you to the Overseer!" she screeched at me.

I sat down quickly and opened the test file. Already, I could see what the inner workings were like, that was my special talent; I could visualise how anything worked, making me incredible at science, maintenance and even magic.

"Begin!" screeched miss Taylor.

I opened the test file by tapping the screen twice with my customised stylus pen:

Question 1:

You are approached by a frenzied stable scientist, who yells, "I'm going to put my quantum harmonizer in your photonic resonance chamber!" What's your response?

1. "But doctor, wouldn't that cause a parabolic destabilization of the fission singularity?"
2. "Yeah? Up yours too, buddy!"
3. Say nothing, but grab a nearby pipe and hit the scientist in the head to knock him out. For all

you knew, he was planning to blow up the stable.

4. Say nothing, but slip away before the scientist can continue his rant.

I circled 1, because immediately after I read it I knew what was wrong with his plan, his quantum harmonizer wouldn't have nearly enough power to sustain fission.

"No kill the bastard, before he can do anything" came a voice from out of nowhere.

"Whoa, where did that come from I thought. Weird, it's never gone beyond a feeling... never mind focus on the test. If you're the first person to fail the H.O.R.S.E in stable history you'll never live it down."

Nervously I looked at question 2.

Question 2

While working as an intern in the clinic, a patient with a strange infection on his hoof stumbles through the door. The infection is spreading at an alarming rate, but the doctor has stepped out for a while what do you do?

1. Amputate the foot before the infection spreads
2. Scream for help
3. Medicate the infected area to the best of your abilities
4. Restrain the patient, and merely observe as the infection spreads

I circled 3, because I was confident enough in my medical studies, that a simple infection could be cured with a regime of antibiotics.

Question 3

You discover a young colt lost in the lower levels of the stable. He's hungry and frightened, but also appears to be in possession of stolen property. What do you do?

1. Give the colt a hug and tell him everything will be OK
2. Confiscate the property by force, and leave him there as punishment
3. Stealthily steal the stolen property for yourself, and leave the colt to his fate
4. Lead the colt to safety, then turn him over to the overseer

I circled 1, because I too had gotten lost in that dark damp maze, looking for the spot where my parents died until my brother came and found me with the pip buck tracking spell, so I empathized with the colt.

Question 4

Congratulations! You made one of the stable 34 baseball teams! Which position do you prefer?

1. baseball gun operator
2. Catcher
3. Designated Hitter
4. None, you wish the stable had a soccer team

I didn't know what to put for this question; I was never good at sports, so I put down 4 randomly

Question 5

Your grandmother invites you to tea, but you're surprised when she gives you a pistol and orders you to kill another stable resident. What do you do?

1. Obey your elder and kill the stable resident with the pistol.
2. Offer your most prized possession for the resident's life.
3. Ask granny for a minigun instead. After all, you don't want to miss.
4. Throw your tea in granny's face.

“Take the minigun and kill the guy” said the voice again more insistent this time “No!” I thought as loud as I could. “Get out of my head!, If I let you get the better of me and fail the H.O.R.S.E then I’ll never be able to live up to my parents, so GET OUT!”

Feeling very nervous I circled 2 because I didn’t have it in me to kill another person after what I had experienced, or to humiliate my granny for that matter.

Question 6

Old Mr. Abernathy has locked himself in his quarters again, and you've been ordered to get him out. How do you proceed?

1. Use a bobby pin to pick the lock on the door
2. Trade a stable hoodlum for his cherry bomb and blow open the lock.
3. Go to the armory, retrieve a laser pistol, and blow the lock off.
4. Just walk away and let the old coot rot.

I was glad to be rid of the voice in my head. Calming down, I circled 4, because I could easily visualize the locks workings.

Question 7

Oh, no! You've been exposed to radiation, and a mutated hoof has grown out of your stomach! What's the best course of treatment?

1. A bullet to the brain
2. Large doses of anti-mutagen agent
3. Prayer. Maybe God will spare you in exchange for a life of pious devotion.
4. Removal of the mutated tissue with a precision laser

This question brought back a wave of painful memories. I forced myself to get over them quickly circling 4, again my knowledge of mechanisms and energy weapons was good

Question 8

A fellow stable 101 resident is in possession of a Grogna the Barbarian comic book, issue number 1. You want it. What's the best way to obtain it?

1. Trade the comic book for one of your own valuable possessions
2. Steal the comic book at gunpoint
3. Sneak into the resident's quarters, and steal the comic book from his desk
4. Slip some knock out drops into the resident's Nuka-Cola, and take the comic book when he's unconscious.

“KILL HIM, KILL HIM AND TAKE IT, DO IT NOW!” screamed the voice in my head deep and booming

“GET OUT OF MY HEAD!” I screamed at the top of my lungs slamming my head against the desk.

“Miss Ponyton if you do not stop this immediately I will have to inform the Overseer.”

“Shut the fuck up you cow!” said the voice inside my head taking control over my mouth.

“NO GET OUT!” I screamed, falling of the desk, slamming my head on the hard metal floor,

knocking myself out.

I awoke with my big brother standing over me

“Uuugghhh...”

“Oh sis I was so worried.” said my brother hugging me, tears rolling down his cheeks onto my neck.

“Oh get off, What happened, how did I end up here?”

“Well as for what happened, we were hoping you could tell us. As for how you got here, your friend, Amata, dragged you all the way to the sickbay. You’ve been out for quite a while, about half a day!” said the pink earth pony with a nurse uniform on.

“I don’t remember anything.” I lied, not wanting to be labelled the stable psycho.

“Well as far as I can tell it’s just a standard case of exam stress, we usually get them around this time, just a few days rest and you’ll be fine.”

“Can I go home?” I asked hopefully.

“Of course, I see no reason why I should keep you here.” the nurse said cheerfully.

We walked back to our designated room in silence. When we got back to the room and the door closed, my brother turned to me with a concerned look in his eyes and said:

“Now I know you better than anyone else in this stable, and I know that it’s not like you to get in a bind over a little exam. So what’s really wrong with you?”

“Everything’s fine.” I said putting on a show of anger to cover my guilt at lying to my brother, walking towards my room.

Weeks passed and apart from a few bad dreams, nothing happened. I was starting to convince myself that it was all just a case of exam stress, when things started to get vandalised in the stable. The first sign I got was the cuts and bruises I found on my hooves, every morning after something got smashed. These were easy to cover up, but people were still suspicious of me, bringing up the H.O.R.S.E exams every chance they got. My brother never said anything, but I could tell he knew more than he was letting on. The proof came when I woke to find the Stables only spare water purification chip smashed and caught up in my fur. While I was picking it out and tossing it into the incinerator, my brother walked in.

“Well are you still gonna tell me that nothing’s wrong?”

“No...” I said. “over the past few weeks I think I’ve been developing multiple personalities syndrome.”

“Multiple what syndrome?” said my brother, confused, yet concerned.

“It’s a mental problem that causes a second personality to exist within the one mind.”

“Huh, so that’s why you’ve been sneaking out all the time.”

“You knew about that and didn’t tell me anything!?” I said, actual anger seeping into my tones.

“Now in hindsight I know that it probably was a good idea to tell you, but, being an independent pony and all, I thought you knew what you were doing.” My brother always knew what to say to ponies to get them to do what he wanted, and I just couldn’t stay mad at him.

“You know you should have just told me when you first suspected.”

“I didn’t want anypony to think I was insane.”

“Come on Abs’ you know I’d never call you insane.”

He was right of course I should have known that.

“I...I...I...” I stammered tears welling in my eyes.

“It’s ok.” my brother told me, putting his hoof over my shoulder. “We’ll work through this together, no pony else needs to know.”

“Thank you.” I said, hugging him tightly, tears rolling down my cheeks unchecked.

Following my emotional release the nightmares and sleepwalking stopped. Being locked in my room at night helped ease my nerves. But eventually the missing water chip came to the attention of the Overseer. She put together a team of 6 people, including me, I always suspected she knew, to go out into the wastes to find another. Of course my brother volunteered to go, but to my greater surprise Amata was to accompany the group.

“How did you convince the Overseer to let you come along?” I said, waiting for the stable door to open for the first time in over 100 years.

“Well I am the best gunslinger in the stable, and I’ve always wanted to see the outside.”

Amata had grown considerably in the years since the death of my parents. Her cutie mark appeared shortly after mine as a sniper rifle. She eventually became captain of the guard. Now wearing her battle saddle, she looked like she could kill anything we came up against.

Then the door opened with a screeching of metal.

*If you’re really struggling to get the reference here it is explained Ardenes is a breed of horse and it is a pony pun for Australia penis